

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAHORE 00911 080525Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 534

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: FORMATION OF NEW PUNJAB CABINET BEGINS

REF: LAHORE 0875

1. DR. ABDUL KHALIQ (FINANCE), BRIG. (RETD.) SAHIBDAD KHAN (COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKS) AND SYED M. MASUD (LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS) WERE SWORN IN AS FIRST BATCH OF MINISTERS IN NEW PUNJAB CABINET AUGUST 6. CHIEF MINISTER SADIQ HUSSAIN QURESHI ANNOUNCED AFTER SWEARING-IN CEREMONY THAT DR. KHALIQ WOULD RESUME POSITION OF SENIOR MINISTER HE HELD IN RAMAY CABINET.

2. QURESHI DID NOT DISCLOSE WHAT TOTAL STRENGTH OF CABINET WOULD BE, OR HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE TO COMPLETE. "IT IS A BEGINNING," HE SAID, ADDING THAT A NEW FACE (MASUD) HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CABINET AND MORE WOULD BE INCLUDED LATER. HE EXPECTED THAT KHALIQ AND SAHIBDAD KHAN, WHO HAD "VAST EXPERIENCE" AND SERVED IN PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, WOULD PERFORM WELL IN NEW CABINET. CHIEF MINISTER POINTED OUT HE HAD PROMISED TO INCLUDE MEN OF INTEGRITY IN CABINET AND PROMISE WAS BEING FULFILLED. HE TOLD NEWSMEN IF THEY FOUND ANYTHING WRONG WITH HIS MINISTERS "YOU CAN POINT IT OUT TO ME."

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PAGE 02 LAHORE 00911 080525Z

3. ONLY NEW FIGURE IN CABINET SO FAR, SYED MOHAMMED MASUD, IS FOUNDER-MEMBER OF PPP FROM LYALLPUR AND WAS ELECTED TO PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY IN DECEMBER 1973 IN BY-ELECTION FOR LAHORE SEAT. MASUD, A LAWYER AND TEACHER IN HIS FORTIES, IS MEMBER OF PUNJAB PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE OF PPP, AND PRACTICES BEFORE LAHORE HIGH COURT AND SUPREME COURT. HE WAS MEMBER OF PAK DELEGATION TO 1974 UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. MASUD IS CONSIDERED TO BE SLIGHTLY LEFT-OF-CENTER IN PPP, BUT IS NOT IDENTIFIED WITH ANY FACTION OR GROUP. PM BHUTTO REPORTEDLY BACKED HIM AS HONEST AND SINCERE MEMBER OF PARTY. WITH BROAD LEGAL BACKGROUND, MASUD WOULD APPEAR TO BE EXCELLENT CHOICE FOR LAW MINISTER (FULL BIO FOLLOWS BY AIRGRAM).

4. COMMENT: NEW GOVERNMENT, THOUGH PROCEEDING SLOWLY, SEEMS OFF TO GOOD START. KHALIQ AND SAHIBDAD KHAN ARE HIGHLY RESPECTED HOLDOVERS WHO PROVED THEMSELVES ABLE AND SYMPATHETIC ADMINISTRATORS. MASUD IS UNEXCEPTIONABLE AS NEW LAW MINISTER.

5. QUESTIONS OF RIGHT-LEFT AND PERSONAL FACTIONALISM, HOWEVER, ARE STILL UNRESOLVED. FORMER GOVERNOR KHAR'S CONTINUING ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE PUNJAB CABINET APPOINTMENTS REMAIN FLY IN QURESHI OINTMENT TO HEAL OPEN SORE OF FACTIONALISM AND RESTORE PARTY UNITY. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS IS FACT THAT WHEN QURESHI FLEW TO ISLAMABAD TO CONTINUE CONSULTATIONS WITH BHUTTO ON CABINET FORMATION AUGUST 1 (AFTER TWO DAYS OF PARLEYS WITH PRIMIN IN LAHORE), KHAR WAS CONSPICUOUSLY INCLUDED IN DISCUSSIONS. FOLLOWING AUGUST 6 SWEARING-IN, QURESHI AGAIN FLEW TO ISLAMABAD TO PICK UP THE THREAD.

6. SEEMS CLEAR THAT KHAR IS PRESSING HEAVILY FOR INFLUENCE IN NEW PUNJAB GOVERNMENT AND PRESSURE IS WORRYING PARTY STRATEGISTS FROM BHUTTO ON DOWN. SPECULATION CONTINUES STRONG IN LAHORE THAT IF KHAR IS NOT ACCOMMODATED HE MAY PICK UP HIS MARBLE AND TRY TO WRECK THE GAME.
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